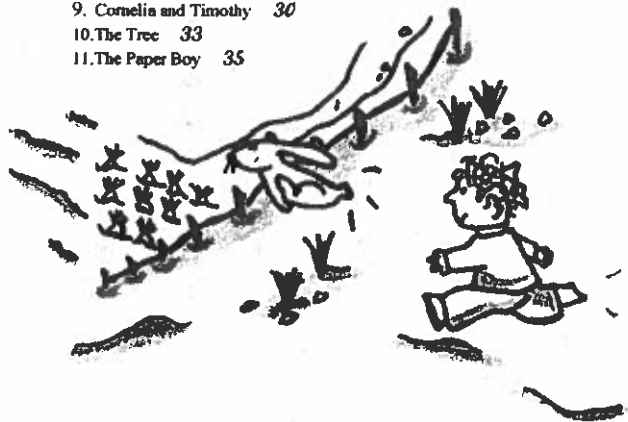


398#10



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## *The Boy Who Owned the Forest*

398#3

There once was a boy who owned a forest, one could even say he was the King of this forest, although no official title was actually given. He was simply the boy who owned the forest. This forest stretched across from one horizon to the next, full of plum coloured trees that bore silver fruits the size of chubby pigeons. When they would get too heavy for their tree's branches they would fall to the ground and burst into silver dust that would settle on the ground; so that the entire forest floor was made of sparkling silver dust.

The forest was a quiet, serene place - so much so that many great scholars would reside there so they could study, invent and create in peace. Each scholar had their own personal dwelling that they made with their own hands and means. The inventor's was a tall silver tower with many spinning things, and shiny things, and things that gave off smoke of different colours: blue, red and dusty rose. The composer's house was made of bricks and had a thatched roof. In it was a grand piano, a cello, a tambourine and many other instruments that I don't know the names of. The writer's house was a beautiful log cabin made with the plum coloured trees of the forest. Inside were shelves of books and a desk with pots of ink, quills and parchments scattered everywhere. The dancer's house was made of brick like the composers, but the roof and one wall was completely made of glass in which you could see into the house - and see that all of the walls had mirrors on them. The dancer liked to see the beautiful nature that inspired him to dance and he also liked to perform for the forest animals, who would watch intently through the glass. There were many other homes in the forest, but none quite as interesting as the four I have mentioned.

The boy who owned the forest's house was a hodgepodge of all of these. He asked the inventor to build his home tall like her's, and he asked the composer to thatch its roof, and he asked the writer to make parts of his home with interlocking logs, and he asked the dancer to make part of his ceiling made of glass so he could see the stars at night. The four gladly built the boy's odd home, for he had granted them all permission to dwell in his beautiful forest.

One day the boy decided to visit the scholars. First he went to the inventor's tower for breakfast. She greeted him kindly and used a system of pulleys and ropes to raise him up to the highest level of the tower where they could see that the forest truly did reach all the horizons. She brewed tea in an

odd shaped pot that gave off bright blue steam and served it to the boy with a stack of delicious pancakes. After breakfast she taught the boy how the pulleys worked, and all about her experiments and the different coloured steams. The boy was enthralled.

"What does this do?" he'd ask and the inventor would tell him.

"How does this work?" and the inventor would explain.

The boy asked to borrow books from her so he could read more about inventing when he was home and she gladly let him borrow as many books as he wished.

Next the boy headed to the composer's house for lunch. The composer made tuna sandwiches with alfalfa sprouts. After they'd eaten the composer sat at her grand piano and played a tune.

"That was beautiful!" the boy exclaimed. "I'd love to be able to play music."

So the composer gave the boy a wooden flute and gave him a quick lesson and told him what he should practice when he was at home and the boy thanked her and promised to practice.

Next the boy arrived at the writer's house for dinner. The writer made the most delicious meat and vegetable pies with the tastiest gravy. As they ate the writer told his latest story to the boy who listened in rapture.

"That was magnificent!" the boy said. "I think I could make up a story..."

The writer told him about plot and character traits and gave him a quill and parchment so the boy could work on his writing at home.

Next the boy went to the dancer's home. He watched with the squirrels and rabbits through the glass as the dancer flew through the air and seemed to turn on the spot like a top. When the dancer finally stopped his performance he smiled to the boy and beckoned him to come in for a night time snack of creamy yogurt with sweet fruit.

"How did you do that?" the boy asked. "When you jumped in the air and went-" and the boy attempted to mimic the dancer's graceful leap.

"That's quite good," the dancer told him. "I could begin to train you and one day you might be able to do that leap as good as I."

"Really?" the boy asked.

"Yes, I do think so," the dancer said and showed the boy some simple steps and corrected the boy, and told him what to practice when he got home.

By the time the boy who owned the forest got home he was tired. He took out the books the inventor had given him, and then the wooden flute the composer had given him, and then the quill and parchment the writer had

given him, and then he cleared the space so he could practice the dance steps the dancer had shown him.

"But what shall I do?" the boy mused aloud. "I don't have time for all them at the moment, and I'm dreadfully tired. I supposed I should go to bed."

And so the boy changed into his flannel pyjamas and climbed under the covers.

The boy had had so much fun with the four that a few days later he went to visit them again. The inventor wanted to discuss the information that was in the books the boy borrowed but the boy hadn't read them all.

"How do you expect to become an inventor like me if you don't read your books and think about new ideas and discuss them with other inventors?" the inventor asked.

"I don't know," the boy answered sheepishly. "I'll read the books and come back."

Next the boy went to the composer's for lunch.

"Come, I'll play the cello and you play your wooden flute and we can play this fun little duet I composed," the composer said eagerly and handed the boy a sheet of music.

"But I...I haven't learned to read the music yet," the boy told him and the composer's face fell.

"Well, I guess we can wait until you learn then. Come back when you have, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll come back," the boy said and headed off to the writer's for dinner.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you," the writer said. "I've been writing a story about two young sisters and the ocean and I've stumbled upon some dreadful writer's block. Why don't you read me what you've written to help inspire me?"

"I'm sorry, I haven't been able to write anything," the boy had to tell the writer.

"Oh well, perhaps you have writer's block then too," the writer said with a chuckle. "But when you do write something, be sure to stop by and read it to me."

"Yes, as soon as I'm done writing it I'll come read to you," the boy promised and headed off to the dancer's house.

"I'm glad you've come," the dancer told him. "I've been eager to see how you've improved with the steps I showed you to practice at home. If you've mastered them I'd love to be able to teach you some more. Maybe we could even do a little duet."

"I...I'm not right sure I remember the steps you showed me last time," the boy told the dancer.

"Well, haven't you practiced them?" the dancer asked.

"No, I haven't. But if you show me again I promise I will practice and when I come back I'll be so good we can do a duet."

So the dancer went over the first steps he'd taught the boy and showed him some more steps to practice at home too. The stars began to twinkle through the dancer's glass roof so the boy decided to head home for the night.

The next day the boy who owned the forest made sure to read up on inventions, learn to play the notes from the sheet music, attempt to write a story and practice the steps the dancer had shown him. He had great fun doing so, even though he was so busy he forgot to eat.

He went and visited the four scholars' but none of them were quite satisfied, even though he had practiced.

"Why can't I be as good as you?" the boy asked all four of them and they all told him the same thing: "He had to practice hard and devote all his time to his skill."

The next day and the days that followed he read and played and wrote and practiced, so diligently that he forgot to sleep as well as eat. Yet, in all his anxiousness to be talented at so many skills and impress his teachers he did not notice the state of his forest. The silver fruits were growing dull and were shrivelling up. Instead of growing ripe and silver and then falling to the ground to cover the forest floor in silver dust, they were simply dying so there was no more beautiful sparkling silver carpeting the forest. The plum coloured trees were beginning to lose their vibrant colour. The scholars did notice and it worried them, so much so that it affected their studies and creativity. They all decided to give the boy who owned the forest a visit.

The four scholars were surprised to see one another all at the boy's home. They had all met before, but often kept to themselves. The composer rang the doorbell and the boy hesitated in answering it - he was in the middle of writing an exciting story.

"Why, what are you all doing here?" he asked when he finally opened the door to them. "Shall I prepare some food?"

"No, that won't be necessary," the inventor told him.

"Well, do come in," the boy said.

"Have you all come to talk to the boy about the forest?" the composer asked the others and they all nodded.

"What about the forest?" the boy asked.

"Look," the dancer said pointing out the window. "The forest is dying."

The boy looked out the window and gasped. "What's happened?"

"We don't know, we came to find out," the writer said.

"Perhaps it's because you've been spending too much time reading up on inventions," the inventor suggested.

"Reading up on inventions?" the composer questioned. "I thought it was perhaps he was spending too much time learning to play his wooden flute."

"Inventions? Wooden flute?" the writer said. "I thought he had been working on a great work of literature!"

"And I thought he was practicing his dancing so we could do a duet," the dancer said with a frown.

"Have you been doing *all* these things?" the inventor asked and the boy nodded, his eyes cast to the floor.

"Perhaps that is why the forest is dying," the composer said.

"And perhaps that is why you can't write a great masterpiece, you aren't giving it your all," the writer said.

"And why you can't focus on your dancing," the dancer said.

"What should I do to save the forest?" the boy asked.

"I don't know, I don't have an invention that saves forests," the inventor told him sadly.

"It isn't our forest," the composer pointed out.

"No, I do not believe we can help you with this," said the writer.

"It's not our speciality," the dancer said.

"Our work," the inventor said.

"Our passion," the composer said.

"Our life's ambition," the writer said.

The boy sighed.

"We should leave now," said the inventor. The others agreed and left the boy alone in his hodgepodge house of towers, logs, thatch and glass.

The boy climbed up into his tower and looked out onto the horizon and at his neglected forest that was now a dull shade of grey.

"What have I done?" he whispered. "All I wanted to do was invent, and play music, and write and dance...I'll I wanted was to be talented, like all the others who live in my forest. I wish I had a special talent."

A wind blew, rustling the canopy of the forest, as if saying "*I, I am your talent boy. I am your passion and your reason to live. I am the forest and you own me.*"

The boy sighed. He'd known his whole life he owned the plum coloured forest that reached to all horizons and bore silver fruits the size of chubby pigeons. He knew in his heart and he knew in his soul. He also now knew in those places that trying to have another talent would be fruitless. And that all the others, they only had one great talent, which was their heart and their soul. And the more he thought about it and the more he realized, the more colour returned to the bark and leaves of the trees and the silver fruits began to grow once more and would soon be big enough to fall from the branches and burst on the floor, spreading sparkling silver dust.

The boy quickly rushed to his pantry and packed a basket full of scones, butter, jam and brownies and then ran to each of the four scholar's houses to invite them all to a picnic.

"We're all very proud of you," the inventor said once they had all begun to eat at the picnic.

"Yes, it's wonderful that you've found your passion," the composer told him.

"And now the forest and all that dwell here can prosper once more," said the writer.

"Including yourself," the dancer said with a smile.

Just then a plump fruit fell off the branch of a nearby tree and burst into silver dust when it hit the ground, sprinkling the inventor, the composer, the writer, the dancer and the boy who owned the forest.

end

## *The Maze*

**396#3**

Lucy walked along the paved path in the summer heat. The field of cornstalks were reaching to the blue sky on her right, way above her head. In front of her was a rollerblader, a bicyclist was passing on her left, and railway tracks lay behind her. The wind rustled, making the corn sway.

"Lucy..." a voice called from the corn field as the bicyclist whizzed by.

She stopped, and noticed a parting in the corn - just wide enough for her to enter.

She looked back to the tracks: no one was there. She looked ahead; both the bicyclist and the rollerblader had gone around the bend in the road. Lucy took a step towards the corn.



The wind rustled the cornstalks once more and this time Lucy heard the words, "*Come in Lucy.*"

Lucy took another step forward. "Who's there? How do you know my name?"

"*Come Lucy.*" The corn parted a little bit further. Lucy stepped into the cornfield, the stalks at least a foot above her head. She began to walk forward; a pathway through the corn had opened up before her. She wandered along until she came to a fork in the path, which way to go: left or right? She chose to go right. But the pathway with the walls of cornstalks just kept going and going.

"Where am I?" Lucy called.

"*You're so small...*"

Lucy shivered and the cornstalks began to grow around her, taller and taller, closer and closer to the sky, the darkening sky. She turned to leave, hastily trying to back track her steps but only came to a dead end. She tried to push through the cornstalks but they wouldn't budge, not even enough for little Lucy to push through.

"*Go forward, not back.*"

"I want out!" Lucy called nervously. "Let me out!"

"*Find your own way.*"

Lucy swallowed back a few tears and hugged herself - the air was getting cold. She let the tears silently roll down her cheeks. Unbeknownst to Lucy, every time a tear fell to the ground a colourful eggshell would appear.

"I think I've been here before!" Lucy cried when she came to yet another dead end. She was about to continue on when she felt something crunch beneath her sneaker. She lifted her foot to see a piece of shattered mauve eggshell.

"Oh, I hope I didn't kill the poor baby bird," she said, but alas, there was no yoke and it was just a fragment of a bigger egg.

"*Leave it be,*" came the voice. Lucy picked it up and cradled it in her hand. The cornstalks grew even taller, nearly blocking out the setting sun.

She shortly found a piece of a blue eggshell. Then she found a yellow piece, and then an orange, and then a green. Lucy could fit the pieces together to make a whole egg. The egg was getting so big she had to cradle it in her arms and let it lean against her chest. But every time she found a piece of the shell the voice would protest and the cornstalks would grow taller, yet Lucy felt stronger for each piece she fit together and her tears had subsided.

Finally she found a pink piece that completed the egg. As soon as she fit it in the egg's puzzle-like pieces smoothed over in a wave of silver. And the cornstalks rose until it was dark and only the egg gave off a dull silver

light. The egg then grew warm and began to shake in Lucy's arms. And the cornstalks grew even taller. Then the egg cracked open and a tiny yellow beak popped out and began to chirp. Then a white wing, and another, and a whole bird the size of Lucy's head came flying out. It was a sleek white bird with a slender neck, black beady eyes, and a long tail that split into a fork – like a lizard's tongue. The egg shell fell to the ground and turned back into tears that sank into the ground.

"Lucy, it is so dark!" the bird sang and flew up into the darkness, softly glowing silver. The bird broke through the cornstalk roof and the pink glow of the setting sun filtered in. "I'll help you find the way out," the bird called. "Which way would you like to go?"

*"Don't follow the bird."*

"No Lucy, let me help you. You don't belong here in this darkness," the bird explained and flew down to perch on Lucy's shoulder. "Let me fly above where I can see the maze of the cornstalk's twists and turns and I will guide you out."

"Okay," said Lucy.

"There are many exits though," the bird told her. "One leads to a castle where the bakers make lovely raisin scones, another leads to a palace made of gold, another to my country where my kinfolk fly above great trees, another is a place that's very placid, and yet another is full of fire and excitement."

"Please, I just want to go home – to the paved path by the railway," Lucy told the bird.

The bird cocked her head to the side and then flew up into the sky and disappeared from sight. She returned shortly and landed once more on Lucy's shoulder. "I do not see this place you talk of, with paved paths and railways. You must choose another, and quickly! for soon the sun will be gone and we will be left in darkness."

"Let us go to your land then," Lucy said.

"Of course! You'll love it there!" the bird sang and flew up into the sky, above the cornstalk maze. She guided Lucy, telling her which turns to take, and before she knew it she was out of the dark and in a great green twilight forest where many birds of different colours, shapes and sizes flew about.

"You are too big to sleep in my nest, but I'm sure my friend the great green bird won't mind if you sleep in her nest with her chicks," the white bird said and told her which tree to climb.

Lucy climbed the tree and was greeted by a bird with sparkling emerald coloured feathers. The bird was bigger than Lucy and had an even

bigger nest that had three smaller green birds sitting in it. They welcomed her and gave her a blanket and a pillow (not feather stuffed, of course) and they all went to bed. But even though the great green bird's nest was quite comfortable, Lucy could not sleep. One of the little green birds couldn't sleep either and noticed Lucy's restlessness.

"What is wrong?" he chirped.

"I don't belong here," Lucy whispered back.

"True, you don't have wings. You'll never fit in here unless you have wings. I shall guide you to another world."

Lucy climbed down the tree, making sure to be quiet and not wake the others, while the little green bird flapped beside her. Once in the maze Lucy noticed the cornstalks had returned to their original height – just above her head.

"I see a lovely castle. Humans live in castles, don't they?" the little green bird called down to her.

"Yes, but most don't in my world," Lucy explained.

"Well, perhaps a human there will be able to take you to your world," the little green bird said and flew off in that direction before Lucy could protest.

The cornstalks began to slowly grow taller.

*"Don't follow the bird."*

"Oh, shush - I know the way," the little green bird called. "Turn left here little human."

The sun was beginning to rise just as they reached the grey, stone castle.

"I must leave you here, my mother will be worried about me," the little green bird said and flew off.

Lucy thought about going into the maze and finding her own way out, but just then a plump maid came out of the castle and saw her.

"Why hello young lady, are you lost?"

"I'm -"

"You look famished and tired! Come in and I'll find you some food and you can have a rest in a nice big bed. What do you say?"

Lucy was hungry, and very tired, so she agreed.

The maid gave her raisin scones with creamy butter, and a dish of strawberries with real whipped cream and even a plate of pancakes with syrup – but it wasn't maple syrup. When Lucy was stuffed the maid led her up to a beautiful guestroom with a four poster bed. The sheets were made of lilac coloured silk and lavender was sewn into the pillows to make them smell nice. Lucy was so exhausted she fell asleep as soon as she lay down.

The kindly maid pulled her sneakers off and covered her up with the comforter.

When Lucy awoke after a good sleep she wasn't quite sure where she was. She looked out the window and she could see the edge of the cornfield, and then she remembered. It was twilight once more and the sun was slowly sinking in a haze of orange and pinks. She found her sneakers and pulled them on and left the room. She wanted to go home.

She wandered down a corridor, and then a hall, and then up a spiral staircase, and then through another hall and down a spiral staircase.

"Can I help you?" came a voice from behind her as she walked down a corridor.

Lucy turned to see a young man in rich looking clothes.

"I think I'm lost," Lucy told him.

"Where are you trying to go?"

"Out."

"Why?"

"I need to get to the cornfield, so I can find my way home."

"Really? Where are you from?"

"Somewhere else."

The young man was silent. "I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Damien."

"I'm Lucy. Can you help me find my way out of the castle?"

"But it's getting dark. Why don't you stay here tonight?"

Just then the plump maid came into the corridor.

"Oh, good evening your majesty," she said and curtsied to the young man.

"Good evening. Could you please find this young lady a room?" Damien asked her.

"But of course, I was just looking for her so I could give her some supper. She arrived early this morning and has been sleeping all day," the maid explained.

"May I join you for supper?" Damien asked Lucy.

"If you like, your maj-"

Damien shook his head and smiled. "Call me Damien, please."

"If you like," Lucy said nervously – she had never met a king before.

A beautiful dinner was laid out for them, with pineapples, and salads, and other colourful dishes. Damien and Lucy talked and smiled and laughed – getting along like old friends. Lucy completely forgot that he was a king and nearly forgot that she was lost.

"We're having a great ball tomorrow evening, will you stay for it?" Damien asked.

"I don't know...I really wish to return home," Lucy told him.

"I would be very pleased if you could come. There's sure to be several dresses for you to choose from to wear somewhere in the castle, and there'll be a great many interesting people and..."

"And...?"

Damien sighed. "Actually, the parties really aren't that exciting - I only have them because I'm supposed to. I'd really like you to be there to keep me company. I feel so out of place at them, but I'd feel more comfortable if you were to be there."

"Maybe I'll stay then, but just one more night," Lucy said with a smile.

The next morning the maid took Lucy to a great room full of ball gowns. They were made of the finest fabrics and came in a variety of different colours. It was difficult to choose but the maid helped her find one that suited Lucy nicely. It was a bright blue silk dress with a pale blue sash around the waist. When Lucy went to show Damien her dress he went into the royal jewellery room and found her a beautiful pair of sapphire earrings and a matching necklace.

"A thank you gift, for saying you'd stay," he told her.

"Oh no, I couldn't..." she said, pushing back the jewels.

"No, I insist. They just gather dust here. I'd rather someone beautiful be wearing them."

Lucy felt her face grow hot. "Thank you. But tomorrow morning I must leave to find my home."

"If you insist," Damien said sadly. "At least I'll see you tonight."

That evening the guests for the ball began to arrive in great carriages driven by the most beautiful white horses. The guests were even more beautiful; all dressed their best in dresses as fine as Lucy's. But even though Lucy was dressed in the same glamour as everyone else, she felt very out of place at the ball. She longed to find her way home.

She quickly found Damien. "I'm sorry, I must leave to go home now."

"No, please. Don't leave now," Damien pleaded and took her hands in his. "I don't feel like I belong here either, except when I'm with you."

"I'm sorry," she repeated and pushed past all the guests and out the doors into the night. She ran to the cornfield and into the maze, the cornstalks standing tall just above her head. She kept running and running.

Her beautiful dress kept catching on the cornstalks and ripping, and it was very dark, but she just kept running and running. She could hear the sound of a train whistle and ran toward it. The cornstalks began to grow taller and taller, blocking out the little light she had from the moon and stars, but she kept running. The train whistle was getting louder and then she could see the paved path - the one she had stood on that sunny day where the rollerbladers and bicyclists zoomed on by. That seemed like ages ago. She shoved the corn aside and stepped out onto the path, just as the train thundered by.

"I'm home," she whispered to herself. But still, it didn't feel right.

A group of teenagers walked by and whistled at her. "Nice dress. Where ya' going? The prom?"

Lucy shook her head and collapsed in exhaustion. The teenagers snickered and kept walking. This was not her home. Yes, it was where she started, but it wasn't her home. She fiddled with her sapphire necklace and looked towards the cornfield. The wind rustled the stalks and the voice called her name: "Lucy..."

She stood herself back up and entered into the cornfield maze once more. She had to find her home. She staggered along, cold, tired and hungry.

"Lucy..." she heard someone calling. She looked up, but it wasn't the fork-tailed white bird or the emerald green bird. The cornstalks didn't grow. Lucy wandered until she came out of the maze onto a sandy beach and on the beach stood a tiny little cottage.

"Lucy..." someone called but she walked on and felt the sand beneath her feet. The waves sang music, crashing against the shore.

"Lucy! I've found you," came a voice from behind her and she turned to see Damien.

"What... What are you doing here?" she asked.

Damien looked around. "Is this your home?" he asked.

"No...I found my home, but it wasn't...I..."

"It's beautiful here."

"Yes...I think...I think this *is* my home," she told Damien.

Damien took Lucy's hand and Lucy gently squeezed Damien's.

"I think this is my home, too," Damien said.

end

## *Summer*

**398#4**

Whenever I smell the scent of fresh cut grass I think of her. It's as if she embodies the scent, yet she smells like so many other beautiful things as well: coral coloured roses, silky apple blossoms, fresh morning dew. Her skin was like warm sand on a beach and her eyes were as blue as the waves. Her hair was a halo of golden curls, framing her serene face with its soft, sunset-pink lips.

She would come knock at my door early in the day, while the morning doves were still singing. Her anklet had tiny silver charms and bells that sounded like an ice cream bicycle in a dream - by that sweet music I could always anticipate her knock. All day we would play in the brilliant sunshine; only there did she really seem alive, free.

She always wore pretty dresses of the most wonderful colours: peach, lavender, cream. She would drag me down to the river near my home, the same river where boys would gather at to hunt for snakes, smoke weed, and spray paint the underpass were the sweltering expressway roared above. But with her, it made going to the river the closest thing in our suburban lifestyle to getting close to nature. It was nearly as ethereal as her, as a freshly blossoming orchid or the way the sky glows when the sun disappears over the horizon.

She could find snakes as good as the boys, but she'd always be gentle to them.

She would slip off her worn brown leather sandals and wade in the cool water. The river was murky and polluted but wherever she stepped it seemed to become clearer. None of the leeches that sucked the blood from the boys would grab her soft, brown skin. The crayfish wouldn't pinch her or scuttle away rapidly, but simply let her pass.

She was everything I wished I could be and everything I couldn't be. I was entranced by her that entire summer. I was never quite sure where she had come from. As the days began to get colder and the days shorter, it was as if she was beginning to wilt. She could no longer wade in the river for it was much too cold. She couldn't find any more snakes. She had to wear bulky sweaters over her pretty dresses and nothing seemed right anymore. Her brilliant brown sugar skin began to take on a dull grey hue.

One day I woke up and I saw the first leaf change colour. It was as if time had stopped except for that one leaf, as if nature was trying to tell me that I wasn't going to see my friend anymore. Even so, I did wait in hopes of

her return. I waited, lonely and listening to the morning doves until their music faded. A blue jay flew by, chirping loudly. I sat in my backyard in the freshly cut grass, waiting and crying. I waited and cried for her all day and she never came. I did the same the next day and the next until all the leaves had changed and fell to the ground and the snow began to fall and I realized there was no hope of her ever coming back.

More time passed. There were no leaves on the trees yet but the days were getting warmer. I looked out my window to see what I hoped would be the last snowflakes of winter gently careen to the frozen earth. I looked down to the grass, brownish and tired-looking, and I gazed at the spot where I had sat and waited and cried all those miserable days since she had left. Just as time had frozen before for the leaf, it seemed to do so again. A tiny green stem pushed through the dirt and grew taller and thicker. Thorns grew from the stem and a velvety bulb expanded until it burst with petals of a rose of all colours. They were all the beautiful colours that were her, that were summer. It swayed in the chill air as the fluffy white flakes landed around it. The same feeling I had when I saw the changing leaf overcame me once more, and I knew that the rose was a goodbye. Summer would come again, but she would not come with it. She had somewhere else to be, someone else to help.

end

## *Chapter Eleven*

398#4

"Those wings? Do you think those ones will do?" Lane asked Cornelia.

They gazed up at the tall statue of a stone woman with wings. A brisk breeze blew off the lake, contrasting with the April sunshine.

Cornelia nodded. "Those will do."

Lane looked around, to see if anyone was out on the beach. It was too cold for swimming, but there could be people enjoying the sun.

"Get them," Cornelia urged.

"Right," Lane said and began to climb the statue.

"Be careful," Cornelia told him.

He looked down and gave her a toothy smile and then began to climb once more. When he reached the top he grabbed hold of a stone wing to steady himself.



"Dear woman with the wings, we have a favour to ask," he whispered, but his words were carried by the wind down to Cornelia, who smiled.

"What favour do you ask of me young man?" the woman asked.

"My friend, below," Lane said, nodding to the smiling Cornelia. "She needs your wings so she can fly away."

"Don't you wish to fly as well?"

"Of-" Lane began and then made his whisper even quieter. "Of course I do, but she needs this more than me. She's still so young."

"You are not very old yourself," the woman pointed out.

"She needs this more than me," Lane explained. "Please, grant her your wings so she can fly."

The woman smiled solemnly. "I am but a stone. I cannot fly myself, only when I sleep and dream of such things. Take my wings, and perhaps one day when they grow back you can fly as well."

"By then I'll be old," Lane said.

"Do as you wish when the time comes. Now take my wings and give them to the girl."

The cold stone in Lane's hand began to warm and turned into soft feathers. Lane let go and the wings fell from the woman's back and gently glided down to Cornelia, who caught them and gazed at them, speechless. Lane quickly climbed down, jumping the last few feet.

"She says they're your's," he told his friend and brushed a strand of her light hair behind her ear for what might be the last time. And then a tear fell from her eye and he brushed that away too.

"Why are you crying?"

"You've given me so much. You deserve to fly," she said and pushed the wings towards him.

"The woman said they were for you," Lane told her.

"I don't think I can leave you..."

Lane sighed. "The woman said when her wings grow back she'll give them to me and then I can fly."

Cornelia swallowed some tears. "Really?"

"Yes," Lane said with a smile. He cupped her head in his hands and kissed her cheek. "Cory, it's time for you to fly."

Cornelia nodded. She passed the wings to Lane and turned her back to him. He gently put the wings on her.

"Don't look back," he told her. "And one day I'll appear at your side."

"Promise?" she asked, looking out at the horizon and not turning her heads towards him.

"I promise," he said and let his fingers comb through her hair as she flew off into the sky and over the lake and away.

end

## *The Winter of the River*

398#5

Will came running over to Mary's house, ice skates swung over his shoulder, a blue toque covering his messy brown hair and a yellow scarf around his neck. He pounded on her door. Mary, a young girl with long golden hair draping over her shoulders, answered with a smile.

"What is it Will?" she asked.

Will looked to the sky, a wry smile on his face as snow flakes drifted down around him. "It's been snowing and cold for a week now Mary...I think the river will be frozen."

"I'll get my skates."

The two children, Mary twelve and Will eleven, headed down their street to the river that ran through the little meadow, ice skates over their shoulders.

"What happened? There..." Will asked Mary, as he brushed a piece of her hair away from her face to reveal a bruise.

"Oh, I fell," she said and pushed her hair back.

Will laughed. "For someone who skates as good as you do, you're an awful klutz off the ice," Will teased.

"Yeah..." Mary said and laughed lightly.

A shroud of trees covered the narrow river. They pushed through them and then slid down the snowy bank to the ice, laughing.

"You test it," Mary said, pointing to the river.

"But of course," Will said, bowed to her, and then gingerly stepped out onto the snow covered river. "Feels frozen," he said and did a few little jumps and stomps - the ice held.

Mary grimed and began to take her boots off to trade them for her skates. Will sat down beside her and began to do the same. As soon as Mary was done she glided out onto the ice.

"Beat you," she said and spun around as Will finished the last lacing of his skate.

"Think you're so fast - race you to that log," Will said and before he could say, "Go!" Mary was off.

But Will whipped by her and she ended up reaching the log a few seconds behind him.

"Race you back to our boots?" Will asked, but Mary was staring off into the distance.

"What is it?" Will asked her.

"Where does the river go to?" she asked him.

Will looked down the river. They could see to where it made a bend in its path, but not past that. The trees arched overhead, snow gently sprinkling down through them.

"I don't know where the river goes," Will said.

"Well, we could find out, couldn't we?"

"I don't know Mary...I told my mom we'd just be on the river..."

"We will be on the river."

"I mean, the river here, by the field where the houses are being built."

Mary frowned. "But I want to know." She started skating away.

"Mary no!" Will said and grabbed at her sleeve.

"Come on Will, where's your sense of adventure?"

Will looked down at his hockey skates. "Mary, I think we should just stay here. Why can't we just skate like we usually do?"

"I'm tired of skating like we usually do," Mary told him stubbornly.

"But it's our first skate of the year!" Will protested.

"I'm going to find out. Come or stay, it's up to you," Mary said and skated off, leaving a miserable Will behind.

Will's thoughts raced. Should he go with her to make sure it's safe? Follow her and try to convince her to come back? Or stay where it was safe where his mother wouldn't yell at him for being? But his mother would probably yell at him for letting Mary go off on her own...

"Mary! Mary, wait!" Will called and skated off after her.

Mary did a swirl on the ice to end facing her friend. "I knew you'd come," she said and started off again.

The trees began to get closer together, forming a near complete arch over their heads and blocking out the light from above. It began to get dark.

"Mary, maybe we've gone far enough. Maybe we should go back,"

Will said. He was getting tired and falling further and further behind.

"Just a little bit more Will, please," Mary called back to him.

And then there was a sound. A horrible sound one does not want to hear while skating on a river: *Crock!*

Mary screamed and disappeared under the surface.

"Mary!" Will cried and skated to the edge of the hole and slid onto his knees, peering into the water. "Mary!" he called but he couldn't see her anywhere.

Suddenly an ice white hand reached out from the depths, grabbed Will by his yellow scarf and pulled him under before he even had a chance to scream.

Will found himself floating - floating down through an astonishingly deep depth of water, yet he was comfortably warm and able to breath. He looked below him and saw Mary floating down too, her eyes shut and body limp. Sparkling white fish swam around him, making soft cooing noises.

"Mary," he called and the word swam out of his mouth and down to Mary, and spiralled along her body, yet her eyes remained closed. The word continued floating, to the river floor. Strange white trees grew down there, with white bark and sparkly snowballs hung from their delicate branches, tiny snowflakes falling from each ball of snow.

Mary's body gracefully reached the river floor and she lay there, in the white snow. Will gently landed beside his friend, but just as he was about to reach over to her something hit him away and he went rolling head over heels into a tree trunk. When his head cleared he saw a skinny boy clad in an all white three-piece suit with a white woolly toque on his head sitting next to Mary, his head inclined over hers.

"What are you doing to her?" Will called to him and the new boy's head snapped up and tilted to the side, catlike. In his pale white face were startling large blue eyes that bore into Will uncomfortably.

"I'm going to help her," the boy told him.

"Is she going to be okay?" Will asked and crawled over. "Where are we?"

"Sshhhhh," the boy said to Will and then turned back to Mary. He leaned down his head until his lips met hers.

"Stop it!" Will said and pushed the boy away.

The boy started at him. "Do you want her to die?" he asked.

"No, of course not!" Will said.

"Then let me help her."

Will watched wearily as the skinny boy leaned over Mary once more and laid a kiss on her lips. Mary blinked and opened her eyes.

"Will?" she said wearily.

"I'm here," Will told her and helped her sit up.

"Where am I? Who are you?" she asked the boy.

"My name's Jack, and you are in the Unwinderly," he said and sprang to his feet to bow. "And you my dear, shall be my queen," he said to Mary and gave his hand for her to take, but she declined.

Mary turned to Will. "Am I dreaming?"

Will didn't answer her. "What do you mean she shall be your queen?"

Jack folded his arms and tapped his foot, giving a reproachful look to Will.

"If a mortal girl falls through my ice, I got to make her my queen. And you, boy, shall be my servant."

"What if we don't want to stay here?" Will asked.

"You don't have a choice," Jack told him and tilted his head upwards. Above them was a sky of thick grey ice.

Jack then made a loud whistling noise. A sled lead by three large, silvery-white fish arrived. Jack gave his hand to Mary and this time she took it. Jack helped her into the sleigh and then got in beside her. Will was not invited into the sleigh and so he skated after them, desperate to keep Mary in his sight.

However, Jack did indeed make Mary his wife. They had a great wedding that all the fish attended and Mary was constantly dressed in the most magnificent gowns of white and silver. Over time she enjoyed playing games and laughing with Jack. She nearly forgot about poor Will who was forced to do chores all the time, until one night he snuck into her room.

"Mary, I've got an idea to escape," he told her. "Come with me."

"Will?" she asked, for she hadn't seen him in so long. "I've missed you Will."

"Then come with me now and we can escape," he told her eagerly.

"Leave? But I like it here. No one... hurts me here."

"What do you mean? Mary, this isn't your home. Come home with me."

Mary hung her head, her blonde strands covering her face. "Will, you may leave if you like and I won't tell Jack I knew about it, but please, let me stay here."

"But Mary..."

"Please Will," she said and then they heard foot steps coming to the door. "It's Jack. You best be off. Good bye Will, I'll miss you always."

"And I you," Will said, quickly kissed her on the cheek and then ran away.

Will had seen a crack in the ice that day. He took the axe he used to cut fire wood for their majesties with and began to swim to the frozen surface while the kingdom slept. He swung the axe at the ice and broke his

way through. As soon as he did, icy cold water filled his lungs. He pushed himself to the surface, gasping for air and sopping, but with warm tears running down his cheeks. All the way home the tears streamed down his face, keeping him from getting chilled in his soaked clothes.

*I know she'll change her mind and come back someday,* Will thought to himself. *And I'll be there waiting.*

Everyday Will would visit the little river. Spring came all around, yet the river stayed frozen and snow hung from the branches of the trees around it. Summer came too, and every day Will would walk through a meadow of wild flowers to the winter of the river, expecting to find Mary there...but she never was.

Years passed, and ever day of every year Will would visit the frozen river and Mary would never appear. He refused to give up, even though he was getting old. He still dreamed of her often, skating along the river with her golden braids trailing behind. If it wasn't for the dreams Will feared he'd forget about her.

One day in mid-August, when all the birds were singing, Will made his way down to the river. The trees around the river had no leaves and snow gently fell to the ground among them.

"Mary..." Will called softly as he always did, and nothing happened. He was leaving when he heard a familiar cracking noise. He quickly turned.

The ice had cracked open and from it rose a beautiful young girl clad in a magnificent white and silver dress. You'd barely be able to see her against the winter scene had it not been for her mass of golden hair.

"Will?" she asked softly.

"Y-yes..." Will said. "Mary?"

The girl nodded and Will rushed forward and embraced her, then released her and saw her face.

"But you haven't aged a day," he said, astounded.

"Below the ice, in Unwinderly, I am immortal," she explained.

"And have you come up now, to come away with me? To leave horrid Unwinderly?" he asked.

"Unwinderly is not a horrid place to me," she told him. "I've come to talk to you."

Will was crestfallen she still didn't want to leave. "And what do you have to say?" he snapped at her.

"Will..." she said calmly. "You have to let me go."

"Let you go?"

"Yes, stop holding onto me Will. Stop coming back to the river everyday, looking for me. You have to let your love for me go."

"But Mary, that's impossible," Will said. "I've loved you forever."

"I know...but you must let me go Will. You have to move on. We're a part of different worlds now."

"But we don't have to be. You can come back."

Mary shook her head. "I can't come back. I've been immortal for too long, the strain of returning to this world would kill me."

"Please Mary, don't make me do this," Will pleaded.

"But you must, for the sake of the river. Its winter all the time because you won't let me, the Queen of Unwinderly, go. Set me free Will, let the river return to its natural course. It's best for all of us, you must move on to your natural course as well."

"I don't want to," Will said.

"Sometimes you must do things you don't want to do," she told him gently.

They were silent for a few moments and then Will nodded and hugged her one last time. "If it's best for you..."

"It is," she assured him.

"Then...Then I let you go," he told her and before the words even left his lips she had disappeared. The ice began to melt. Will quickly ran to the bank so he wouldn't fall into the river. The snow melted off the trees and buds began to grow, bright and green, and the grass began to sprout. All around him summer began to bloom and the river returned to normal. Will looked down the river, to where it was flowing around the corner, and wondered where it went to. He began walking along the bank, to find out.

end

## *The Piano that Swam*

398#6

My mother died.

My mother used to play the piano.

My mother died, but father kept the piano.

I would sometimes catch father staring at the piano after her death. It was as if he was willing it to play like mother used to do every night after dinner while father did the washing up. He'd say, "It's a pleasure to do the

dirty work when accompanied by such beautiful music." Then he'd fill up the sink with soapy water, mother would play, and I would dance some childish made-up dance which would sometimes make them both laugh.

I distinctly remember one night when father was staring at the piano. The sink was piled high with dirty dishes. We were out of clean bowls and running low on spoons. I walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder. He slowly turned to look at me. He had crying eyes, the kind that are red and sad.

"I could dance for you," I whispered. It was so quiet in the house, I felt it might fall apart if I made more noise than a whisper.

He shook his head and turned away from me, back to staring at the piano. I tiptoed back to my bedroom. I got out my crayons and drew a picture. The picture was of my mother, playing the piano. I hid it under my mattress so father wouldn't find it and be more sad.

Father wasn't the only one who missed mother. I did too, and so did the piano.

One night I lay in bed, surrounded by darkness and silence. My night light had burnt out. I didn't want to ask father to put a new light bulb in it, mother used to do that for me. But I couldn't sleep in the dark. I heard a train go by in the distance. *Choo-choo-chooooooooooooo*. I heard something moving down the hall. I thought maybe it was father - if he was still up maybe I would ask him to put a new light bulb in my night light. The train in the dark scared me.

I went out into the hall, but father wasn't there. At the end of the hall the piano could be seen sitting in the living room, facing me. Its ivory keys looked like teeth, the sloping wood that sheet music and music books full of notes would rest against looked like a moustache. The piano began to move. I gasped and jumped back into my room. I heard it moving down the hall, towards the door to the outside. I peeked around the corner and saw the piano amble out the door. I could hear father snoring now. I crept out after the piano.

I had never been out in the dark by myself. The moon was bright above and surrounded by stars, but it was still very dark. I saw the piano making its way down the street. A group of fireflies came down to fly around me, they guided my way through oceans of darkness between the islands of spotlights from the streetlamps.

The piano made its way to the little river. The piano got into the water and with its feet on the bottom the water was just deep enough to lap at its keys. The piano swam about in the water and the current would push the



keys down, making noise, but I wasn't entirely sure if the river knew what music was – it didn't sound anything like how my mother used to play.

The wind came and sent a single shiver down my entire body.

"Piano, come back now!" I called to it. "I'm cold."

The piano hesitated, and then came back up to the house. I snuck back into my bed, father still snoring.

*Maybe, I thought as I drifted off to sleep, what the river needs is some music notes to read.*

The very next night I heard the train whistle in the dark. I slipped out of bed and into the hall just in time to see the piano go out the door. I grabbed some sheet music from mother's box next to where the piano usually was and began to follow it down the road. This night was darker than the one before. Low rumblings could be heard amongst the stars. A pitter-patter of rain began to fall.

The piano went to the river again, and the sky rumbled more, shaking the stars. Flashes of light could be seen in the distance as the stars fell from their spots in the sky. The rain began to fall harder.

"Piano come back!" I called as it slid down the bank into the water.

"It's going to storm, come back!"

But the piano wouldn't listen to me and the storm was now upon us. The wind ripped through the branches of the trees that lined the river.

I tried to get closer to the river, to give it the sheet music. I began to climb down the bank, but it was now muddy and I went sliding down into the water. I landed with a crash upon the piano's keys – sound other than thunder filled the air. I placed the soggy papers of notes on the piano.

"Play river, play!" I said, but the river didn't know how to play, even when it did have notes to look at and it was getting deeper from the rain. The current was pounding me against the piano.

"Come piano, the river can't play you like mother did," I told it, trying to pull it out of the dangerous water. But the piano refused to move.

"I'll get lessons!" I told the piano. "I'll ask father to send me to a piano teacher and I'll get lessons and I'll learn how to play you! Just like mother!"

The piano shifted in the muddy river bottom and then pulled itself out of the river. I hung onto it tightly so I wouldn't be pulled away by the current. We lay on the river bank, black leeches stuck to my legs, arms and toes.

The next day after dinner father was staring at the piano once more. I tapped him on the shoulder.

"What is it Deirdre?" he asked without turning.

"Can I take piano lessons?" I asked him.

"No," he said.

"Why not?"

"I said no."

"But mother said when I was old enough, she'd teach me to play."

"Mother isn't here to teach you."

"But she would of liked me to learn from someone else then," I said.

"Wouldn't she?"

Father said, "No."

"But--"

"Go to bed."

It was much too early for bedtime but I went anyway. I lied awake for a very long time, until it got dark and then the train whistled. Then I knew the piano would be leaving the house again and I wanted to follow it.

It was raining again, pouring. The sky thundered and shot bright bolts of lightning down to earth. The piano tumbled into the river and let the current push it around. There were moments when I couldn't even see the piano amongst the crazy water.

"Piano! No!" I shouted and jumped into the rushing water. The river nearly pulled me away from the piano, but I grabbed on. "Piano, don't do this! Don't leave like mother!" I said, but it didn't listen. It let itself be pulled along by the current, tumbled about through the muddy water and I had to hang on with all my strength.

"I can't play you piano!" I screamed through the storm. "Father won't let me! I can't play you piano!" I beat fiercely on the keys until my hands hurt. The notes were barely audible against the rush of the river and the roar of the storm.

"Don't leave like mother, please!" I told it, now crying. "I'll learn to play, I'll learn somehow. I'll teach myself. I can't lose you piano, you're all I have."

The piano pulled itself with me attached to it out of the river. I lay on the bank, gasping for air.

The next night was calm. The train called the piano to the river and I followed. The piano sank into the still waters and I followed. The piano

waited patiently and then I gently put my fingers on the keys and I began to teach myself to play.

It took years, but every night we'd go down to the river and play together. I grew older but my playing got better and father never knew. He'd still stare at the piano as all his hair turned grey. I wondered if I should play for him. I wondered if I was as good as mother. Would my playing make him happy, or would it make him sad?

I grew older still and so did father. His hair began to fall out and I wanted to move out. But I knew father wouldn't let me take the piano and I wasn't sure how I could continue without it.

Then father got sick. He was old and dying and only had a few breaths left to breathe, every one of them like a count down to the end. It was best I stay with him.

One night after dinner, I washed the dishes and then gave father his medicine. I was headed to my room when I saw the piano and I knew I had to play.

I went to the piano. I sat at it inside the house for the very first time and played a song mother used to play, but I wasn't sure if I was as good as mother or if I ever would be.

But then father called down the hall. "Melinda?"

I rushed to his bedside.

"No," I told him, sitting next to his bed and taking his hands in mine. "It was Deirdre, your daughter."

But he had gone.

end

## *The Abandoned School* **398#7**

Down the road from where my sisters and I lived there was an old abandoned school, with broken windows and unlocked doors. It was in a field, all alone, back a bit from where the street ran.

There was also a castle. It was an ancient castle, with brambles covering all its walls and inside slept the princess: Briar Rose. She was under the spell of an evil fairy to sleep until kissed by a prince. My sisters and I would tip toe through the castle: the Three Warrior Sisters. Our swords were held ready to fight back the briars and to slay the dragon. We'd hope her highness wouldn't be upset that she wasn't saved by prince charming.

but the three of us never did find her. We searched all the rooms: in spring, summer, fall and winter.

Our boots would squeak on the tiled floors in the winter, wet with snow. Dinner time would always come before we ever found the princess and we'd have to return home before it got dark.

One autumn day we were fighting the dragon when prince charming showed up. We had never thought to think how he would feel about our rescuing the princess in his place.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Slaying the—"

But one of my sisters stopped me. "Nothing," she said.

"This is our castle," I told the prince.

"Castle?" he asked.

My other sister sheathed her sword and shook her hair out of her face. She was the bravest of us three, surely she would tell the prince that we were here to save the sleeping princess and that he better leave us to it or be prepared for battle.

"C'mon, let's go," she said instead.

"But why?" I asked, outraged. "We must save Briar Rose!"

"Mel..." my sister said to me, and didn't continue.

The prince continued to watch us, curious. I was not brave like I believed my sisters were and couldn't tell him to leave. My sisters left and I was forced to follow. We walked in silence down the damp street, rain drops dripping from the crimson and golden leaves that hung above our heads. I wanted to ask why we left, but I didn't think they'd answer.

After that day my sisters no longer wished to return to the castle. I would beg them to go back but they would always say no. I was afraid to go alone, but every night I'd dream about the castle and the young girl sleeping inside of it, waiting for someone to come and wake her up. I asked my sisters if they had this same dream, but neither of them ever did.

One night I awoke, just after dreaming the same dream about sweet Briar Rose: her castle covered in thorns, no one able to get in. I wanted to wake my sisters and have the Three Warrior Sisters go save her once and for all. I wanted to skip down to the castle in the sunshine and sing songs that we would make up about ourselves, the gallant heroines. I wanted to spin until I got dizzy and fell over. I wanted to run until my lungs hurt and my mouth became full of phlegm. So I did.

I ran to the abandoned castle, sitting in the light of the moon and stars. I tried to draw my sword, yet it was no longer at my side. But that was okay, because when I approached the thorn and bramble covered castle, the

dangerous plants parted way and let me through. When I got inside, doors that were usually unlocked were locked. I stumbled around in the darkness of the castle, trying to look for an unlocked door, one that would lead me to the sleeping princess. Before I could find one I bumped into someone who was already awake.

"What are you doing here?" It was the prince.

"I'm here to wake her," I told him. "Do you know where she is?"

"This way," he said and the prince took my hand in his and began to lead me through the dark halls. He must have had eyes like cats to know when to turn and when to go straight, for I was still blinded by the darkness.

I heard him click open a door. The room was softly lit, and there in the centre of the room laid Briar Rose, fast asleep.

"You must wake her," I told the prince.

"How?" he asked.

"You kiss her."

But instead of kissing the sleeping princess, the prince kissed me. I tried to ask why, but then I just let him continue to kiss me and I returned his kisses.

When next I woke I found myself on a filthy floor. Sunshine was filtering through a dirty, broken window. I got up and found the door. I walked down the halls of the crumbling building. Could this be the same castle I had been in the night before? I found the door that led outside and stepped out into the morning. I walked to the road and looked back to where the castle usually stood, but instead it was just the old abandoned school.

end

## *Mermaid*

398#7

I had been to a friend's birthday party. There was alcohol and people dancing to loud music wearing tight clothing. They were all trying to be beautiful and none of them were succeeding. I was only there because my friend begged me to come, because it was her birthday. I said alright but wore my regular clothes. I didn't own clothes for this type of outing anyway. I watched the people dancing and drinking and smoking and trying to talk over the loud music and thought of all the things I'd rather be doing. I tried dancing, after much pleading from my friend, but I didn't find it very fun. Maybe it all makes sense when one is drunk but that was something I wasn't

interested in finding out. I felt lost in the crowd of people, the odd familiar face from someone I went to high school with or maybe I used to work with them, I couldn't remember. It was obvious I didn't belong, and I didn't want to try and be a part of it anyway.

We finally left and walked back to the car. We all reeked of smoke even though none of us smoked. I drove my friend and the others home. I turned off the annoying radio and put one of my favourite cds in. It was nice to finally listen to some music I liked. I began to drive home but didn't feel like going there. I needed to go somewhere where I felt safe, where I felt like I belonged.

I drove to the beach. At first I just sat in my car, in the parking lot, in the dark. There was no one else around. I wondered if it was safe to go outside. People are so fearful about going out in the dark alone. I hate fearing being alone out in the night because it's one of the things I love the most, it's one of the few times I feel right and alive. I like to run and to only stop when I'm tired, and in the winter it's nice to feel the cold wind be refreshing against your cheeks instead of biting.

I got out of the car and wrapped my red sweater tighter around me, clutching my car keys in my hand. I crossed the road over to the beach, stood next to the tall totem pole, and looked out into the dark waves. The waves lapped and the stars shone and I felt like this is where I belonged.

end

## *Cornelia & Timothy*

**398#8**

**SMACK. Pitter patter drip drop drip...SMACK.**

Cornelia opened her wide brown eyes and looked straight ahead, where she supposed the ceiling would be if she could see through the thick darkness that coated her bedroom. Fat raindrops splattered against her window: pitter patter pitter patter **SMACK**. Cornelia did not think that last sound was a raindrop. Drip-drop drip-drop. The rain dripped over the edge of the roof, over the eavestrough. Pitter patter drip drop **SMACK**.

Raindrops do not go "**SMACK**", Cornelia felt sure of this. She sat up and pushed her blankets off her legs. She slipped out of bed and walked across her room to the window. She felt around in the darkness for the curtain's cord and then pulled. She could now see her dark window glistening with raindrops, each partially filled with the light of streetlights.

Out her window she could see her own backyard, which connected with another backyard across from it. She could see the streetlight from the next street over. Each of the lights looked like softly glowing golden orbs. She could see the outlines of the fruit trees in the backyard, swaying, heavy with tart pears and bug eaten apples.

SMACK.

Cornelia jumped and gasped at the same time as something small and white smacked itself against the wet window and then quickly disappeared. She searched the dim light of the backyard to find where it had gone.

SMACK.

Cornelia jumped again. Was it a bird? What was it trying to do?

*I suggest you opens the window,* Timothy said as he crawled across the windowsill. He was a tiny black house spider with little white spots - the kind that jump if you put your finger near them when they're on the carpet.

"It's raining," Cornelia told her arachnid friend.

*It wants to comes in,* insisted Timothy in his quiet little spider voice.

Cornelia swallowed nervously as she undid the window releases as quietly as possible, not wanting to wake her parents sleeping in the next room.

SMACK.

Cornelia had to quickly clamp her hand over her mouth to keep her scream from coming out as the white thing hit the window again. She glared down at Timothy who was descending on a fine thread of web from the windowsill. He stopped a few centimetres down and swayed a little on his thread.

*I thinks it's okay. It won't hurt you,* he said.

Cornelia had no real reason to doubt the house spider. She had been friends with him for quite some time and he always seemed to have an innate knowledge about such things - he was a talking house spider after all.

Cornelia slid the glass window open and then pushed back the screen that was saturated with water. A cool wind blew through her soft, buttery coloured hair and a few drops of rain drifted in. Then something soggy and white flew by, brushing coldly past her cheek before it began to haphazardly fly about her room. Hastily she slid the screen and window closed to stop the rain coming in and then put her full attention to whatever it was that she had just let inside.

She could hear a wet flapping noise moving around the room. Slowly Cornelia walked over to her bedside table and clicked on her little faery shaped nightlight, which filled the room with a blue-ish glow.

The thing flew by Cornelia's face once more and this time she reached out and plucked it from the air. It fluttered in her hands and she "coooood" at it and said things like "there, there" in a gentle voice to make it calm down. Once it stopped moving Cornelia could see it was a little booklet of white papers. She gingerly turned the soggy pages to find words and pictures on the inside.

"What is it?" she asked Timothy.

*I do not know, he replied.*

From that night on Cornelia kept coming across similar little booklets of paper. They weren't all white: some were made of coloured paper or had coloured stamps on the front. Some were held together with staples or some were sewn together with pretty strands of embroidery floss or dental floss or pieces of twine. She would find them under rocks or in the branches of trees, on bus seats or blowing in the wind. In them there'd be writing about love and pain and stories and happiness and comics and recipes and rants and information and poems and photographs and lists of favourite things:

1. canned pineapple
2. chopsticks
3. old books
4. the sound mud makes when you step in it, and then pull your foot out

The little paper booklets made her happy, but some made her sad and some she would read out loud to Timothy before her parents came home from work and made pierogies for dinner. Some she'd read to the squirrels in the forest behind the park, but they were usually more interested in climbing the trees and jumping from one branch to another and going "chitter-chitter-chatter" while Cornelia tried to read them her favourite part.

No one else seemed to notice these little paper booklets, and sometimes people would look extra hard at what she was holding while she was reading on the bus. It kind of reminded her of when she wore her Halloween costume in June, she was a witch. But she didn't mind because she loved the little booklets (and she loved her witch costume too).

*If you love them so much, maybe you should try making one of your own,* suggested Timothy one night.

Cornelia thought that the house spider might be onto something, so she got out some pens and some paper and scissors and glue and a pile of her mom's old fashion magazines she said Cornelia could have for craft



projects. With the help of Timothy she wrote some stories and some lists and made some pretty collages. Then it was ready to all be folded and bound together: she used red embroidery floss. She read her little creation to Timothy and made sure to show him each page as she did so, just like her kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Apple, used to do.

*I likes it, he told her. You should let others see it too.*

That night Cornelia opened up her window. It was a calm night with no rain and little wind. She held her little paper booklet in her hands and told it to fly. Hesitantly it fluttered from her hands but stayed near, flying around her head.

"Go," she told it softly and it flew off into the night, into the world where someone else would find it.

end

## *The Tree*

398#10

1. Josh remembered the tree as a little sapling in his parent's backyard. It slowly grew towards the sky. By the time Josh was 12 he could climb among its branches. He even fell once and broke his arm. Then, when he was 17, he woke up one day and looked out to his backyard, and the tree was gone.

2. Robert was a fisherman, off the coast of Newfoundland. He saw the tree, roots and all, floating in the ocean. He told his wife about the tree over dinner that night. She thought it was odd and passed the peas.

3. Maddy wasn't sure if she saw the tree or not, now that she thinks back to it. She was passed out on the pavement after a night of partying. She was never sure if she really did see a maple tree move down the street through the darkness or if it was just her fuzzed up head playing tricks on her.

4. All Pierre remembers is waking up to see a full-sized maple tree in the centre of his front lawn one morning. He hopped in his car while talking on his cell phone and decided to worry about the tree later. When he got home from work, it was gone.

5. A squirrel once tried to make a nest in the tree. She didn't like the constant change of scenery and decided to nest in a different tree.

6. Sophia was in the forest with her black lab Marty, taking an autumn stroll. She saw the maple move among the tall oaks, Marty barked and tried to chase it but Sophia called him back. When she got home she told herself she must have just been seeing things.

7. Neal followed the tree. He'd just got off work at the sub shop at midnight and saw the tree amble down an alley. Fluffy snowflakes gently began to fall, occasionally illuminated by the streetlights. Neal shoved his cold hands in his pockets and quickened his step as he headed down the alley that connected to another city street. He slowed down, staying a bit behind the tree, trying to make his footsteps as silent as possible in the snow. Was it really a tree?

The city was dead, fast asleep. Not a single car in the street. Buses had stopped running hours ago. The university kids had their weekly pub night the day before.

The tree, roots crunching in the thick layer of snow that had already covered the ground, ambled on down the road, its winter branches bare of leaves but slowly collecting tiny white snowflakes.

Neal began to follow closer behind the tree as they entered the streets of suburbia full of large Victorian houses with their pointed turrets, decorative trim and multiple porches. Neal was practically jogging to keep up with the tree now and then *BAM*, his sneakered foot slid on a sheet of dark ice and he went crashing to the ground.

"Shit," he mumbled.

Neal took a moment before standing, feeling pain throb through his tailbone. He heard the snow crunching and looked up to see the tree looming above him. The tree reached a branch down. Neal took hold and the tree helped him to his feet.

They stood. Looking at each other. The tree didn't have eyes, but Neal felt its gaze upon him.

"Why?" Neal asked.

"Sometimes," the tree said softly, "it's good to do something no one ever believed you could do."

"Oh," Neal said, and the tree then went on its way.

end

## *The Paper Boy*

398#10

Angel had short black hair, cut into a bob. She looked like a 1920's flapper who fell into a pair of blue jeans, pink Converse sneakers and a yellow and white striped t-shirt. She sat on her front porch, her brown bunny Mimi on her lap. It was early Friday afternoon and she was eagerly awaiting the mail. It was a surprisingly warm day in March, not a cloud in the sky.

Angel got butterflies in her stomach as she heard the "clack" of her next door neighbour's mail box. She stood up, cradling Mimi, and walked down the porch steps to meet the postman. He was young, maybe in his thirties, wearing plain black sunglasses.

"Here you go," he said and handed her a bundle of letters, flyers and one little parcel.

She went in the house and set Mimi free to hop around. She quickly put down the rest of the mail on the kitchen table and took the little package to her room. It was a manila envelope lined with bubble wrap, so it felt a bit cushy. She sat on her bed with her letter opener and very carefully opened one end of the envelope. She peeked inside, a smile slowly growing across her wide, skinny-lipped mouth. Gently she pulled out a mix tape and a few zines - one even had a pretty green vellum cover. Then, even more gently, she pulled out her boyfriend. And unfolded him.

Peter yawned and stretched out his pale white arms and then grinned at Angel.

"Hey," he said. "How are you?"

"Excellent," she told him and gave him a peck on his slightly rumpled cheek.

"Come here Angel," he said and drew her into a flimsy hug, wrapping his paper arms around her warm body.

You see, it's much cheaper to travel by mail than by Greyhound or the train to visit your sweetheart on the weekend while away in college, and if you're already made of paper you might as well take advantage of it, as Peter often did. He was a plain white sheet of paper, his features appeared to be drawn on with a black Sharpie marker: two circles for eyes with eyebrows above, one triangular nose and a simple line mouth. His hair consisted of a few straight strokes of bang in the front and the back of his head was coloured in black. Each hand had four square-ish fingers and a thumb, on his feet where drawn a pair of square, black shoes. It looked as

though he was clothed in a pair of blue jeans and a grey t-shirt, both shaded in with a coloured pencil of the appropriate colour.

"I'm so glad you're here," Angel told him as he released her and let one delicate finger glide down her porcelain coloured arm, making sure to not give her a paper cut.

"Me too. The semester's almost done though, soon I can just walk on over to your house instead of this crazy mail business."

Angel smiled and picked up the zines and mix tape. "What did you bring me? Do you want to play cards?"

That afternoon the two love birds played Egyptian Rap and Rummy with a deck of Alice in Wonderland themed playing cards while listening to Peter's newest mix tape creation and talking about the latest zines they read, movies they watched, exams they were worried about and various gossip about people they went to high school with.

"Lauren's throwing a birthday party for Stacey tomorrow night," Angel said as she picked up the Queen of Clubs from the deck. "She invited us, I think we should go. There's going to be a live band and everything."

"And everything?" Peter asked.

"I don't know, cake? Beer?" Angel said as she took a seven of hearts from her hand and put it down on the face-up pile of cards.

"I don't know..." Peter said.

"If you can go all the way to Toronto to go to university you can go to one party," Angel told him.

Peter never liked parties much. It was hard being different. He preferred to spend time alone with Angel, his best friend since kindergarten and his official girlfriend since grade ten.

Peter sighed. "I don't think I want to go."

"But...I already told Lauren I would go..." Angel told him.

"You go then, I'll stay home. It only cost a dollar and two cents to mail me here, it's not that big of a deal," Peter said, picking up a card and tossing down a six of spades. "Just because I'm home doesn't mean we have to spend every second together."

Angel swallowed the lump in her throat and picked up his six and put down a seven. She now had three queens and four sixes.

"Rummy," she said quietly and laid down her cards.

Peter smiled, weakly. "Go to the party."

Angel's parents had Peter over for dinner on Saturday before the party and he decided to stay afterwards to help Angel pick out her outfit.

"Since when are you interested in girl clothes? You never like going shopping," Angel said as she opened her closet.

"Shopping isn't very fun when your clothes are already coloured on," Peter explained. He let himself float down to her bed and then rested, hands behind his head.

"How about this?" Angel said, pulling out the low-cut green tank top she was planning on wearing.

"With another shirt overtop?" Peter asked.

"No, silly," Angel told him and turned around to take off the white t-shirt she was wearing and put on the green tank top. Peter politely turned his head but couldn't help but sneak a peak at her back, for just a second.

Angel turned around. She looked stunning.

"I don't know..." Peter said. "Don't you think it looks a bit...you know..."

"What?" Angel said, examining her reflection in the full length mirror on the back of her door.

Peter furrowed his black brows above his beady black eyes. "Why don't you just wear something else, okay?"

"Fine," Angel said tersely. "What do you want me to wear, Peter?"

He got up from her bed and moved over to the closet.

"I don't...this?" he said holding up a plaid, button-up shirt.

"It's a birthday party, not a hoedown," she told him.

Peter felt like making a remark concerning the first shirt and hoedowns, but he was a good natured paper boy, so refrained from doing so.

"Okay then..." he said and pulled out a pink V-neck t-shirt she had worn on dates with him. It was cute and the V-cut was just high enough so it didn't show any cleavage.

"Okay, I'll wear that," she said and took it from him.

Quickly she peeled off the green shirt before Peter had a chance to walk away. He flinched and his white cheeks turned a little pink.

"Sorry," he said and inched back, covering his eyes.

"Peter..."

"Do you have the shirt on yet?"

"Peter...you realize we've been a couple for five years and you've never...you know, seen me naked?"

"That's fine, I respect you and - ouch!" he said as he bumped into the corner of her dresser and creased his leg.

She quickly walked over to him, still wearing only her lacy white bra and a pair of jeans.

"Are you okay?" she asked, smoothing out the crease.

"Yes, I - " he said and looked at her chest for a moment and then quickly looked away.

"Peter..." she said, moving a bit closer and lowering one of her bra straps.

"Please, Angel. Stop. Your parents are home!" he whispered fiercely.

"And if they weren't?" Angel said as she reached back and unfastened her bra, letting it fall to the ground.

"Angel, please," Peter said, refusing to look in her direction again.

She sighed and picked up her bra, quickly put it back on and then pulled the pink shirt over her head.

"I'm dressed, okay? You should go now anyway, I have to leave for the party."

"Where's Pete? I thought you said he was coming home this weekend?" was the first thing Lauren shouted over the loud music when Angel got to the basement party. Lauren practically lived in a mansion and the basement was unfinished - a perfect place to host a birthday party with a live band.

"Oh, he's in town," Angel said as she helped herself to a Jell-O shot. "He really wanted to come tonight but he wasn't feeling well."

"Oh, poor thing," Lauren said. "By the way, I love your shirt. Green looks really good on you."

Angel felt her stomach flip-flop. After Peter left she changed back into her original choice of shirt.

"When does the band start?" she asked.

"Eleven," Lauren said. "Oh, there's Luke now. He plays bass, he's in my history class. His cousin is the lead singer and drummer and Luke's brother plays lead guitar."

"Okay," Angel said, really only half-interested, her thoughts constantly straying back to Peter. Should she have stayed back with him? Spent as much time with him as possible while he was home? She loved him so much, but she didn't understand why he couldn't go to just one little house party. Most of the people he knew from high school anyway, it's not like they had never seen a boy made of paper before.

"You okay?" Lauren asked.

"Yeah..."

"Then loosen up a little," Lauren told her. "C'mon, I'll introduce you to Luke and the others."

Reluctantly Angel followed. Luke had shaggy light brown hair and was wearing dark jeans with a red t-shirt and a black corduroy blazer. He

was short for a guy, about the same height as Angel's five foot six inches. He smiled at Angel, looking at her with his large, green eyes.

"Hello there," he said and offered his hand. "I'm Luke, a friend of Lauren's."

"Angel," she said and shook his hand.

"Angel is my friend from high school," Lauren explained. "She goes to the U too."

"Yeah, what do you study Angel?"

"Astrophysics."

Luke whistled. "Brains and beauty, what a combo."

Angel blushed. Lauren grinned at her.

"I have to go, hostess duties call," she said.

"I'll help," Angel said quickly and began to follow.

"No, it's fine, really," Lauren told her, pushing her back to Luke.

"Stay here and keep Luke company."

"Yes, please do," he chimed in.

Angel smiled sheepishly. "Okay..."

"So, do you know the birthday girl we're playing for tonight?" Luke asked her.

"Oh, Stacey? Yeah, I know her from high school too. She goes to school in Detroit," Angel told him. "You haven't met her yet?"

"Nope. Just doing a favour for Lauren. Never turn down a gig," Luke said. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"No...no thanks."

Angel made uncomfortable small talk with her new acquaintance for another twenty minutes before he popped the ever-so-sly boyfriend question without actually right out saying, "Do you have a boyfriend?" She didn't know why boys didn't just say this, instead of trying to go about it in such an obvious way. It actually happened to Angel more then she thought it should, but for some reason this time she wasn't prepared.

"Your special someone couldn't make it tonight?" Luke asked offhand, as he nonchalantly nodded to someone else across the room.

"Yeah...um...no..." Angel stuttered.

"Hmmm?" Luke said, slowly turning his attention back to her as if he was still just making small talk, even though since the moment he laid eyes on her he'd been wanting to ask.

"No," Angel said, non-committal.

"No?"

"No, I don't have a boyfriend," Angel said. Instantly she wished she hadn't said it. She felt like vomiting.

"I'm sorry, I have to go," she said hurriedly.

"I'll come with you," Luke said, all smiles.

"To the ladies' room," Angel quickly added and rushed away, tears beginning to sting her eyes.

She bumped into Stacey on the way.

"Oh! Oh, Stacey! Sorry! I mean, happy birthday! I- " Angel stuttered, trying to get her thoughts straight.

"Thanks....Are you okay?" Stacey asked.

Angel sighed. "No, not really."

"C'mon."

Stacey led her upstairs to the living room, away from the noisy party and got her friend a glass of water.

"What happened? Is Peter here? Did someone say something mean about Peter?" Stacey asked.

"No, Peter isn't here."

"Is he okay? I thought you said he was going to be home and you'd ask him to come."

"He is home. He didn't want to come. We had...we had a little fight before I came here and then I just told that bass player I don't have a boyfriend and I just..."

"What's going on?" Lauren asked as she walked into the room. "I saw you two leave...Is everything alright?"

"Angel was flirting with the bass player," Stacey teased.

"Shut up, this isn't funny!" Angel said and began to cry.

"Oh, Angel," Lauren said and sat next to her, looping her arm around her shoulders. "Maybe it's time you did, y'know, flirt a little."

"But Peter..."

Angel's two friends exchanged knowing looks.

"It was cute when you were younger, but now..." Lauren said.

"How do you do it?" Stacey asked, and Lauren gave her a shocked look. "Sorry, but I mean really...we've been wondering."

"Stacey!" Lauren said.

"He comes home on weekends and we talk on the phone. I mean, this year apart, doing the long distance thing, it's been hard but we still love each other..." Angel explained.

"That's not what I meant," Stacey said bluntly. "But never mind...I mean, you've always been the Good Girl, you're probably waiting until you get married anyway..."



Angel blushed. "Oh..." Then realization suddenly dawned on her and moments from earlier that night played through her mind and she was struck with an even bigger realization. "Ohhh."

"What?" Lauren and Stacey both wanted to know.

Angel looked up at them, her big brown eyes red from crying. "I don't think he can..."

"Ohhhh," they both said.

"That's kind of why we both thought...you know, maybe it was time you moved on," Lauren said.

"I mean, can you really have a future with Peter? Is he the One?" Stacey asked.

"I'm only nineteen, geeze," Angel said. She wanted to pretend like she was too young to think about such things seriously, but in truth she had and in her heart she had always planned on marrying Peter. She wanted kids yes, but...that was years and years from now, she could worry about that then. Or so she thought.

Suddenly the song playing cut off and they heard a voice call, "Now where's that birthday girl we're here for?" and Angel realized it was eleven o'clock. She didn't want to spend the rest of the night listening to Luke's band play.

"I should go," she said.

"No, you need to stay and have fun. No more card games for you," Stacey said. "It's my twentieth birthday, you have to do what I say."

Angel stayed the rest of the night and felt pretty miserable. The band was good, they played some covers but mainly they're own material. Angel wasn't exactly a music connoisseur but she was impressed. She tried to keep her eyes off Luke by watching the lead singer, Luke's cousin, and by trying to strike up random conversations with people she vaguely knew from high school. And also, by getting drunk. By the time the set was over she could barely walk, but wasn't feeling quite as miserable.

As soon as Luke left the stage he made a b-line for Angel.

"You guys were fantastic!" she said, a little too giddy.

"Why thank you," he said and put his arm around her waist to steady her. "Do you have a ride home?"

"I drove here...I wasn't going to drink. But then I realized something about my boyfriend tonight..."

Luke laughed but looked crestfallen at the same time. "Your boyfriend?"

"Yeah...he's made of paper," Angel said quietly.

"What?" Luke asked. Not only was he upset that the girl he'd been eyeing all night might have a boyfriend, but she also seemed a little nuts.

"You must be from out of town," she told him, "if you haven't heard of the boy from Windsor who's made out of a piece of paper. And *that's* my 'special someone'."

"Oh," Luke said. "I do vaguely remember hearing about that...he's your boyfriend? You said you didn't have one."

"I am so confused right now," Angel told him. "Please take me home."

Angel made it to Luke's car, but passed out as soon as she buckled her seat belt. Luke shook her shoulder to try wake her, but it didn't work. He jumped as someone tapped him on the shoulder through the open window.

"Hey," his brother Steve, the guitarist, said. "Who's that?"

"Angel," Luke told him. "Is Lauren still around?"

"Lauren? No, she went upstairs with some guy, like hours ago. Why?"

"I need to drive this girl home and I don't know where she lives, she's Lauren's friend."

"Whatever. Just let her sleep at our place tonight. It'll be fine," Steve said. "Now unlock the fucking backseat so I can get in, designated driver man."

"Did Simon take the van home already?" Luke asked as he unlocked the backseat and fired up the engine.

"Yeah. The dude's a wanker. Never drinks...never stays for the party," Steve slurred. "He could be the fucking double-d but nooooo.... Hey, let's go get Taco Bell."

"No, we're going home."

"I hate when you're sober," Luke's brother said, before falling asleep across the backseat.

Luke glanced over at Angel. She was beautiful. She really did her name justice.

"Fuck." He wasted a whole night chasing after the girlfriend of the *paper boy*? And now she passed out in his car and he had no idea where she lived? What a night.

Angel woke with a start. She looked around. Where was she? She groaned as pain split across her head. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed and saw she had been sleeping in her jeans and a green shirt instead of her usual nightgown. And then the memories started to come back in bits and pieces.

"Oh..." she said to herself quietly, looking around at the bedroom she was in, decorated with obnoxious band posters. "Luke..."

She got up, with another sharp pain in her head, quickly slipped on her shoes, picked up her purse from the floor and headed to the hallway. There were more band and movie posters scotch taped to the walls. It must be a house being rented by university boys, she thought to herself. She heard noises in the kitchen and had to pass by to get to the front door. It was the lead singer, Luke's cousin, making himself breakfast. He was much taller than Luke and had very short black hair, but the same green eyes as his cousin.

"Oh, hi," he said awkwardly. "You must be Angel. Want some breakfast?"

"Um...no, I think I just need a ride home or I can catch the bus or something..." she told him.

"Oh, okay. No problem. I'll drive you," he said. "By the way, I'm Simon. Luke's cousin."

"Okay, yeah, nice to meet you," Angel said, not really caring for formalities at this point.

"Right," Simon said quickly, grabbed his keys and put on his shoes. He was about to go outside when he stopped and asked, "Did you want to say bye to Luke first?"

"No, not really," Angel told him bluntly. She just wanted to leave.

"You just fell asleep when he was going to give you a ride home," Simon explained as Angel followed him to a beat up brown mini van.

"Hey, wait!" came Luke's voice as he came running out of the house, wearing beat up grey jogging pants and hastily pulling a white t-shirt over his head. "I wanted to say bye," he said less urgently as he approached Angel. "And I can drive you home now, if you tell me where you live."

"Whatever," Angel said with a shrug, she really didn't care who drove her home, just as long as she got there.

"I'll just be a sec," Luke said and went back into the house to quickly fix his matted bed head hair, brush his teeth, find his keys and slip on a pair of sneakers.

While she waited she sat on the front steps with Simon who tried to make idle chit-chat with her about last night's show and a gig they had coming up next weekend.

The drive home with Luke was awkward. He kept glancing over at her and assured her at least three times that nothing happened, he just brought her back to the house and let her sleep in his bed and he had slept on the couch.

"That's my house, the brown one with the porch," she finally said. He looked over at her one last time and pressed a piece of paper into her hand.

"It's my phone number," he said. "You know...if you ever want to hang out, as friends."

She nodded and got out of the car.

She felt her palms get sweaty as she opened her front door. She had never stayed out at night without calling her parents first. She wasn't sure what to expect.

There, on the living room couch, sat her parents and Peter. She certainly wasn't expecting that.

"Angel," her mother said as she stood up, full of relief that her daughter was back in one piece. "Are you alright?" she asked, just to make sure.

Angel nodded.

"We've been worried about you all night," her dad told her. "We thought Peter might know where you were but we called Lauren's and she said you had already left, maybe you were at Stacey's. We called Stacey's and no one was there. Where were you? Why didn't you call?"

Angel's eyes were stinging. She couldn't look at Peter. She knew he'd notice she was wearing the green tank top he asked her not to.

"I fell asleep," she said quietly. "A friend let me sleep at their place 'cause they didn't know where I lived to drive me home."

"You're such good friends with this person they didn't know where you lived?" her mother asked incredulously.

"I'm nineteen, I should be allowed to do what I want," she told them and began to walk to her room.

"But this isn't like you," her dad said. "We expect you home if you say you'll be home by three."

"I'll let you know next time," she mumbled and went to her room.

Moments later there was very soft knock on the door. "It's just me," Peter said.

Angel didn't answer. Peter opened the door anyway and softly shut it behind him.

"Did my parents send you?" she asked sharply.

"No," he said. "I wanted to talk to you."

Silence.

"Who was that guy who drove you home?"

Angel glanced up at him, her brown eyes stone cold. "Just some guy who gave me a ride."

"Did you sleep at his house?"

Angel didn't answer right away.

"Did you?" Peter asked as he sat on the edge of her bed.

"Yes, I did. But it's not...it's not what you think, Peter..."

"Then why are you wearing the shirt I asked you not to wear?"

"You can't tell me what to do," she said. She was angry at herself yet for some reason she was forcing all that anger towards Peter instead.

"I *am* your boyfriend though," he said. "And I'd appreciate it if you didn't spend the night at other guy's places without telling me. Who knows what else you might be doing while I'm away at school... God, Angel..."

"It was your choice to go to Toronto."

"So what are you saying? I'm not around enough so you go out with other guys?"

"No, Peter! This has never happened before! I didn't mean any of this, but maybe if you acted more like a boyfriend and less like a little brother."

Peter abruptly got up and walked out of the bedroom.

"Peter!" Angel called after him, but he just kept walking and left the house, and frankly, Angel really didn't feel like following him.

The next morning was Monday. Angel woke up to her buzzing alarm and began to get ready for class. Peter would already be in the mail. Xpress Post so he'd make it back in time for his Monday night class. He didn't even phone to say good bye.

She picked up her jeans from the day before and fished Luke's phone number out of the pocket. Maybe Lauren and Stacey were right.

She called him. Luke. They'd meet for lunch at school that day.

"When's your next class?" Luke asked as they met in the noisy cafeteria.

"Not for another two hours, it's at 3:00," she told him.

"Mine's at 4:00, want to go eat by the river?"

"Sure," she said with a smile. She didn't get to eat by the river often, because of Peter's fear of water. He was also afraid of the rain. And fire. And wind. He had a specially made snowsuit for the winter months...there were a lot of things you had to be weary of when you were made of paper. One drop of water could soak into a finger, maybe spread into your hand. You'd have to cut the whole thing off. It was a miracle Peter had lived in one piece for 19 years.

A crisp wind was blowing off the Detroit River. Angel hugged her navy blue hoodie tightly around herself as she ate her slice of pizza she got

from the cafeteria and Luke ate his. They were silent as they ate their food and watched the gentle waves.

"I'm glad you called," Luke finally said with a warm smile. "But how's um... Peter?"

Angel didn't remember telling Luke Peter's name. He must have looked him up, Googled "boy made of paper" on the internet or something.

"He's... fine," Angel said, but in truth she didn't know. Part of her felt dead inside, while another side of her felt excited and free. There was something that sparked inside of her when she was around Luke, when she thought about Luke... something she had never felt when she was with Peter.

Luke realized it was best not to bring Peter up anymore and their lunch date went much smoother.

Angel continued to meet up with Luke – for lunch, for dinner, at clubs after Luke's local gigs. Angel never heard from Peter, no e-mails, no phone calls, most importantly: no mail. She felt like a horrible person for ending their relationship in such a way, but everyone around her, Stacey, Lauren, Luke – they all seemed so happy about the sudden change in current events she couldn't help but feel happy herself.

She lay in bed with Luke one Sunday morning, a gentle smile curling up her lips.

"Do you know what I like best about you?" Luke asked her as he brushed his hand through her silky black hair.

"No..." she said with a giggle. "What?"

"I love your heart," he told her softly.

She smiled and kissed his chest. "I love your heart too."

"I know your heart still thinks about someone else though..."

Angel was silent, her smile faded.

"But that other person," Luke continued, "is it even possible he has a heart?"

More silence from Angel. She closed her eyes.

"I can't help but wonder, how without a heart, he could ever truly love you, appreciate you. Like I do. Like my heart loves your heart. Like I love you."

Angel opened her eyes and looked into his.

"You love me?" she asked quietly.

He grinned and pulled her closer to his own warm body. "Of course I do."

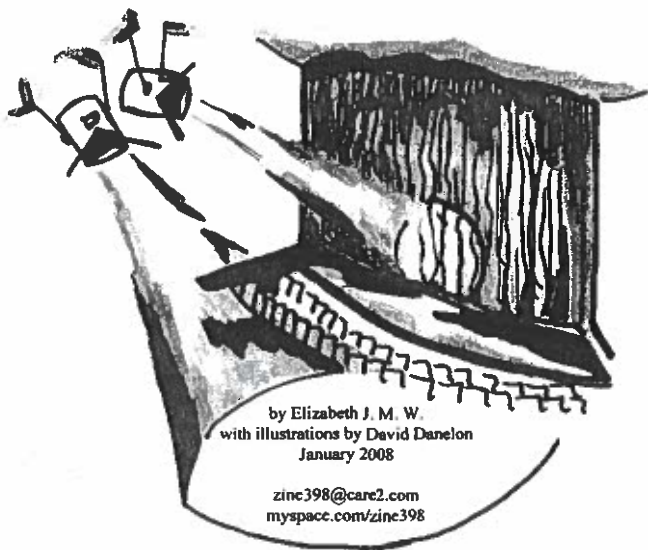
"I love you too."

It was August. Peter should have finished his term and been home for a few months now. And yet Angel had never bumped into him. Luke's words would echo through her mind when she was alone, about love and hearts and Peter. She needed to know. She found herself walking the all too familiar route to his house, but at the same time it felt foreign, like something out of a dream. It had been so long. She walked up to his door and knocked, three times.

Peter answered the door. He just looked at her, his black beady eyes as emotionless as ever. She stood in silence, so many questions running through her mind.

"Yes, Angel," he finally said, his voice also void of all emotion. "Since you were wondering, paper hearts can break too."

end



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